

# Online Community Assembly

## Important Things to Consider

Before you attempt to facilitate a People's Assembly, please make sure you have at least attended one! But remember: it's not rocket science. Give it a go! You'll be great!

This script is just a starting point. As you do more, you'll figure out your own way of saying what's here. Don't feel that this is the only way in which a People's Assembly can be facilitated, although this method is based on many years of experience in PA's by people from all over the World.

Other things to note:

- The two facilitators should be of different genders if at all possible.
- Ensure radical inclusivity! Allow time at the start of the assembly to get everyone familiarised with using the tech. Think about the language you are using. Is it academic or vernacular? Are you communicating in a way that speaks to everyone within your community?
- Remember that all voices are valued equally. Trust the process, and allow all people to speak, even if you are not sure you're going to like what you hear!
- We welcome all people, but not all behaviours: if someone says something that makes you feel uncomfortable (i.e. they may have been racist or sexist), then name the feelings triggered by that behaviour...for example, "what you said just then made me feel very uncomfortable". Do not judge the person: saying "you are a racist" or "you are a sexist" or whatever in this situation is more likely to lead to an escalation, and is likely to put the person into a defensive mode that will make further conversation more difficult.
- People's assemblies are widely used in action groups and civic democracy groups. For example, the Extinction Rebellion '[People's Assembly Manual](#)', provides loads more hints, tips and background information on PAs.

## Logistical Advice for Hosting Assemblies Online

For an online PA, it can be good to have 3 facilitators: 2 Assembly Facilitators, one of whom might also be the Assembly Note-taker. It is also helpful to have a Technical Facilitator, someone who manages the breakout rooms and muting people, but it isn't necessary and it isn't difficult.

**BEFORE THE MEETING, SET ZOOM UP:**

- Under MY MEETINGS, click on the meeting you are facilitating. On the left you will see SETTINGS. Under SETTINGS make sure the following are on:

1. **Participants video:** Start meetings with participant video on. Participants can change this during the meeting.

Mute participants upon entry Automatically mute all participants when they join the meeting. The host controls whether participants can unmute themselves.

2. **Chat:** Allow meeting participants to send a message visible to all participants.
3. **Auto saving chats:** If you wish to capture the chat, maybe as a way to get people to leave their emails for follow up etc, you can automatically save all in-meeting chats so that hosts do not need to manually save the text of the chat after the meeting starts.
4. **Co-host:** Allow the host to add co-hosts. Co-hosts have the same in-meeting controls as the host. A technical facilitator managing breakout rooms will need to make the other facilitator co-hosts.
5. **Nonverbal feedback:** Participants in a meeting can provide nonverbal feedback and express opinions by clicking on icons in the Participants panel.
6. **Breakout room:** Allows the host to split meeting participants into separate, smaller rooms. For information on how to set them up, check the breakout room - technical advice section of the script below.
7. **Share screen:** In the host controls, click the arrow next to Share Screen and click Advanced Sharing Options. Under “Who can share”; choose “Only Host.” If needed, this can be changed back to allowing others to screen share

- Computers or Laptops are best for online Zooms, but it can be done on smartphones too. Tech Facilitators need to be on Computers or Laptops, as you can’t always create Breakout Rooms on phones.

- Ask people who have used Zoom before to sign in 5 minutes before the start time, and those who have not used Zoom before to sign in 10 minutes early and work out how to use the buttons on the screen.

- **This** is an excellent guide on using Zoom that could be circulated to participants before hand

## Input Phase

### FACILITATOR 1: Introduction

Welcome everyone and run through the use of the tech:

- Explain to participants how to mute and unmute themselves when speaking.
- Invite anyone with a poor connection to stop their video to improve audio.
- Check people have the name they would like to be referred to in their profile box and explain how to rename themselves if needed.

- Explain the chat function and where to locate it.
- Explain how to use the icons in the participants channel to provide non-verbal feedback or as a way to raise a hand etc. if they don't have a video.

Facilitators introduce themselves, perhaps say a little of your background and experience with PA's and Community Organising or Projects - Brief but inspiring!

Explain that People's Assemblies have three 'phases':

- Input (includes introduction)
- Deliberation (discussion)
- Integration (Feedback)

### **Input Phase**

During the input phase, we explain the process and structure of the assembly, we introduce the hand signals, and frame the focus of the assembly, as well as what will happen with the outcomes from the assembly.

*(If you are having more input here than just presenting the topic for discussion, such as speakers, video etc you will explain that here too)*

### **Deliberation Phase**

During the Deliberation (discussion) phase, you will be placed in small groups for [insert chosen length of deliberation phase] minutes and discuss the question/topic of this assembly.

### **Integration Phase**

At the end of the Deliberation phase, the groups will come back into the full assembly and feedback what was generated in their small discussion group.

## **Facilitator 2: Hand Signals**

*(Demonstrate the hand signals used in assembly to allow people to use them during the introduction and input phase of the assembly.)*

We use hand signals to facilitate a discussion in which all voices get heard, no one dominates and we don't speak over each other. We will outline the hand signals you will need to take part today. Don't worry if you can't remember them as they will be repeated later in the session.

*(Hand signals rely on visuals, so be sure to explain possible on line alternatives to some of the hand signals, in case if anyone present doesn't have a video, or has to turn their video off due to poor connection.)*

### **HAND SIGNALS**

(As you verbally outline the hand signals, physically show them to ensure people fully understand them).

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
  1. The facilitator will stack, but they can choose to stack out of order to ensure RADICAL INCLUSIVITY and ensure all voices are heard.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can type STACK in the chat, or use raised Hand in the participants panel, or say 'Stack' for their name to be stacked.*
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.
  1. This is to help note taker, who can record the level of agreement, and to make sure people are not interrupting others...remember it's all about ACTIVE LISTENING.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'clapping hands' icon under 'more' in the participants panel, or write 'AGREE' in the chat.*
- **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand.
  1. This is to ensure all are able to fully participate. It is useful if people do not understand anything, particularly important if unfamiliar terms and acronyms are used.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Clarification' in the chat, or unmute and say 'Clarification and their name'.*
- **Direct point:** Two index fingers pointing upwards.
  1. This is not for responding, this is just for extra added information that is directly relevant to what is being said – people must be careful not to misuse this to jump ahead in the queue!
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Direct Point or DP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Direct Point' and their name.*
- **Technical point:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
  1. This is used for technical information such as breaks or timings.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Technical Point or TP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Technical Point' and their name.*
- **Round up: Create a circle with both hands.**
  1. Do this after 2 minutes to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on...remember: RADICAL INCLUSIVITY.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'time' icon under 'more' in the participants panel*
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
  1. If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Speak Up' in the chat, or unmute and say 'speak up' or use the 'thumbs up' icon in the participants panel. If using this you will need to explain to the whole assembly what that icon means so they know to increase their volume if speaking.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support.
  1. This can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

## FACILITATOR 1: Introduce the concept of a People's Assembly

### What is a People's Assembly?

A people's assembly is a structured way for a group of people to discuss issues, generate ideas and/or make decisions collectively in a manner in which all voices are heard and valued equally and no one person, or group, is able to dominate the process.

People's assemblies are 'self selected' meaning that anyone can choose to take part. They are not to be confused with Citizens Assemblies which are randomly selected from the population by the process of Sortition, to make sure it is representative in terms of key characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography. Citizens' Assembly members would learn about critical thinking before they hear balanced information from experts and stakeholders. They would then spend time deliberating in small facilitated groups, similar to the break-out groups we're going to use in this People's Assembly.

People's Assemblies have been used throughout history and all over the world as a means to enable people to come together and achieve real social change:

In Ancient Athens, for example, a people's assembly known as the ekklesia, which was open to all male citizens regardless of class, was where major decisions such as going to war, military strategy and the election of public officials were made.

More recently, in Rojava, Kurdistan, people's assemblies have been at the centre of a democratic revolution. Decisions are made by the community, and the role of the elected representatives is simply to carry out these decisions. The community itself is the seat of power.

In Spain, the Spanish municipalist movement, known as the Indignados or 15-M movement, used PAs to discuss and protest against the government's austerity policies. At the movement's peak, 80 assemblies were being held each week alone in Madrid.

In 2014 the Y'en a Marre movement in Senegal helped oust the incumbent and corrupt President by mobilising the youth vote using people's assemblies and hip-hop.

Closer to home there are the examples of Frome, Torridge and others, all of which are councils that have been reclaimed to some degree by residents in local elections. When councils are run by residents we see decisions get made that prioritise the needs of that community. To give a couple of brief examples, Frome has a Library of Things. This came from a small start up grant of £9000, which enabled over 300 things such as power tools, musical instruments, to be gathered for the whole community to borrow for a small fee. They also repurposed derelict buildings, solar panels sprung up everywhere, a local NHS initiative to prescribe volunteering plus the councils investment in civic and volunteer groups, this led to a 22% reduction in A&E attendances.

### **Inclusivity Statement:**

Before we start a People's Assembly, we like to read out this inclusivity statement:

"We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we

value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

We want to hear your voice, if you want to speak, no matter what. Whatever age you are, wherever you are from and whatever you do.

The whole process will take about an hour and a half\*, and we'd love you to stay for the whole of that, but feel free to go or come as you like or need.

*(If you have the time, it's good to do a TESTIFY at this point. It'll add about 15-30 minutes to the overall length of the PA, but gets people talking about why they are at the PA before the main section of the assembly...)*

## **Testify**

Before we get into the section of the People's Assembly where you will all be able to talk through our specific issue in a facilitated way, we first like to give anyone who would like an opportunity to talk about what has brought them here today.

QUESTION: What has brought you here today?

- Offer the floor to anyone who wants to speak. Ask for a woman to speak first (to ensure that we don't have a succession of men, men and more men).
- Allow as much dead air as is necessary for people to build up the courage to come and talk!
- FACILITATOR 2 is timing and doing the 'round up' signal as necessary.
- After 15-30 minutes, move into the remainder of the PA...

## **FACILITATOR 2: The Three Pillars**

A people's assembly differs from debate where one person is 'right' and the other is 'wrong' and from the typical discussion or conversation where people have a tendency to dominate with questions and interjections. The assembly allows each participant to be held with respect and full attention - and no judgement - whilst sharing from the heart and for each participant to get a turn.

It's ok not to actively share too. Witnessing the sharing of others' feelings and experiences is as important as expressing one's own.

In an assembly, the focus is on personal feelings and experiences. Each speaker is encouraged to say 'I' - rather than 'we' or 'they' whilst sharing with others.

This can be encapsulated within the three pillars, which are:

### **THREE PILLARS:**

- **Radical Inclusivity:** Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices are dominating and the collective

wisdom of the assembly can be reached. People can participate safely and openly, without fear of judgement or ridicule. For those who often speak up in situations like this, think WAIT...Why Am I Talking - try to say only what is needed.

*(Radical Inclusivity also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working with those affected to enable participation. Think about disabled access, sign language, whisper interpretation for those for whom English isn't their first language and other possible means by which those barriers can be removed. Ask at the start of an assembly if there are any barriers to engagement that people need to identify and then request that the group work together to find ways to remove them.)*

- **Active listening:** It is easy to start mapping out in your mind what your response may be while someone is still talking. Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through before developing your responses. Assemblies are not an arena for intellectual jousting or point-scoring but a place that recognises that no one person or group holds all the answers and that through the wisdom of the crowds we achieve powerful intelligence about the core issues being discussed.
- **Trust:** We need to trust the process/facilitators/other participants. This is not a perfect system! It is only effective if we all trust the intentions of the people in the room - if we work in humility and accept that our ideas may not be the best ideas - and we work towards the best decision for everyone.

## FACILITATOR 1: Framing the Topic - What is the aim of THIS people's assembly?

### BACKGROUND

*Frame your assembly here:*

- *Why has it been convened?*
- *What are the aims of this assembly?*
- *Where will the results of this assembly go and what legitimacy do they hold?*
- *Is it a decision making assembly? Is there a yes or no answer that needs to be generated?*
- *Is it to generate ideas or feedback? Where will these go and are they recommendations that will be acted upon or are they feeding into a wider discussion?*

### QUESTION(S)

*State your question or topic for discussion clearly here, and if possible write it up in the exact wording you use somewhere that will remain visible to all participants throughout the assembly.*

*Always ask for any clarifications at this point, and be open to working to reword the question/topic if needed You can ask for a 'temperature check' here to make sure the assembly agrees with the proposed wording.*

*A good question is worded in accessible language, not too long, and is broad enough to allow for free discussion, but not so broad that a structured conversation around it is difficult. Likewise a very specific question won't generate a very diverse response.*

*For example, if you would like to engage people around the topic of buying local produce, you might ask:*

*'Should we start a Food Hub?'*

*This question is very narrow, and really requires a yes or no, so it is unlikely to generate a lot of great ideas.*

*'How can we improve access to local produce?'*

*This question is broader, still focused on local access, gives scope for creativity. 'What can we do to reduce food miles? - Too broad, this could encompass all manner of different approaches and likely to lead to the conversation jumping from local to regional to national issues.*

## Deliberation Phase

### Breakout Room Technical Advice

#### Breakout Rooms

- For the deliberation phase, we use BREAKOUT GROUPS, which Zoom allows us to set up online, as it gives people space to discuss their ideas in smaller groups.
- **Technical Facilitator:** while the other facilitator is explaining what to do in the break-out groups, the Technical facilitator, who must be the person who logged in as the host, or who the host has transferred hosting to, looks at the control panel at the bottom of the screen for the button BREAKOUT ROOMS. If you haven't got it, you are not logged on as the host.

#### Create Rooms

Divide the number of participants in total by the number of people you want in the group, and ZOOM will automatically assign people to group rooms. Once you have done this, look at the lists to check that all rooms have the right number of people.

#### Options

- You can set the options for the breakout rooms.
- You can communicate with all the groups by using the BROADCAST button to send messages about timing to the groups.

- If you feel a bit nervous, get a few friends and give it a test run before you do your People's Assembly.

## **FACILITATOR 2: How does a People's Assembly work?**

You will discuss the PA question in breakout groups of 8-10, then feedback to the entire assembly.

Each group needs a facilitator and a note taker:

- It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that all voices are heard (radical inclusivity). To do this, allow two minutes per statement (maximum) and if people go over, give them the round up symbol.
- It is the role of the note taker to make notes on what is discussed, and to share their group's key points of discussion in the integration phase i.e. when all of the groups have returned to the assembly.
- When the note-taker is taking notes, they can do so in bullet points for ease of recording. Try to capture exactly what someone means, rather than adding any personal interpretations.

For an online assembly you can share a live 'Harvest Doc' for each breakout room's note taker to use. This keeps all the notes in one place and allows participants to look back at the notes from discussions in the other groups. You can make your own Harvest Doc or copy the Template [here](#) into a live doc (such as a Google Doc) to be shared and edited.

Use the hand signals to communicate in your groups and to ensure radical inclusivity. (*recap hand signals here*)

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.
- **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand.
- **Direct point:** Two index fingers pointing upwards.
- **Technical point:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
- **Round up:** Create a circle with both hands.
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support.

10 minutes before the end of your allocated time, the note-taker should summarise the group's notes, then use temperature checks to identify the points that have the most support or acceptance.

The group should then work together to reach agreement on the main points to feed back to the Assembly.

*Decide how you want the feedback to happen. For larger assemblies ensure each group has fewer points to feed back verbally.*



- Remember to get the names of the people giving feedback, and show appreciation.
- Thank everyone for participating. Then explain what will happen to the results of the assembly, including any possible 'next steps' that people could take, or plans for further assemblies.
- *(at this point you can offer space for 'shout outs' - 'Shout Outs' are an invitation for those gathered to call out brief notifications such as upcoming meetings or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. This should take no more than 10 mins)*
- Close the assembly and ideally let everyone know when the next assembly will be if appropriate.

## Appendix 1 - Dealing with Difficult Interactions

### **A collection of thoughts and ideas on how to approach difficult interactions and behaviours:**

- Stress that *"we welcome all people, but not all behaviours"*.
  - Move in when people are interjecting, challenging or talking too much.
  - Make it obvious that we need to have equal sharing and hear of others.
    1. *"The points you are making are really interesting and important but it is also important to hear from other people here."*
    2. *"There is always a danger that the we only hear from the most confident voices - let's make sure that we also hear from the people who haven't spoken so far"*
  - Thank people for their input and seek the positive intention of their behaviour (what are they seeking to achieve that is positive?)
  - Remember, discussions can be won by people who make the most noise. Your job is to ensure all voices are heard.
  - Explain the situation
    1. *"I am conscious of time and our agenda - what is the final point you want to make?"*
  - Radical inclusivity - we want time for everyone.
  - It's important for people to feel listened to without interrupting.
  - You can offer to talk to them in more detail in a break or afterwards. If you need someone to behave differently it can be an expression of Radical Inclusion to connect with them in a break or afterwards to keep in relationship with them.
  - Sometimes with someone who is very unconsciously in need of attention and can't be satisfied with a short interaction, avoiding eye contact may keep them quiet or let them know they have been talking for too long.
  - If necessary, overtly clarify the objectives of the session again and what is needed to achieve those objectives.
-